STATEMENT OF INDIGENOUS WORLD ASSOCIATION

TL 2783-5

THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION, OR FOREIGN OCCUPATION. (Agenda Item 9)

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Delegates,

In addressing the Commission for the first time under item 9 of its agenda, Indigenous World chooses to speak on the question of East Timor since it is a Territory that remains on the List of Non-Self-Governing Territories of the United Nations General Assembly, as it is in the provisional agenda of the 41st Session.

It should be recalled that the question of East Timor was first brought before the General Assembly in 1960 when it reviewed the problem of territories under Portugal's colonial rule. Along with Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tomé and Principe, East Timor was classified as a Non-Self-Governing Territory with the right to self-determination and independence.

East Timor was and remains an issue of decolonization. In fact, Mr. Chairman, East Timor is one case where there were conflicting territorial claims by third parties. However, Indonesia, East Timor's immediate neighbour to the west, made no claims whatsoever. Quite the contrary. On numerous occasions, both in the General Assembly and other fora, Indonesian representatives stated that Indonesia claimed only those territories that then constituted the Dutch East Indies. This was thus the basis of Indonesia's claims, which ultimately resulted in the annexation of Dutch West New Guinea; and East Timor, colonized by the Portuguese in the 16th Century, remained unclaimed by Indonesia.

In December 1975, however, alleging that the situation in East Timor was threatening national security and stability, Indonesia invaded the Portuguese territory. On the 7th December a massive invasion by naval, air and land forces took place. The East Timorese, whom the Indonesian Government claimed it was "liberating", resisted. In the ensuing battle - and which still continues to rage - tens of thousands of East Timorese died.

At that time the population of the territory was estimated to be around 700,000. Ten years later, it is slightly over 500,000. Considering the average annual population growth of 2 per cent and the number of people who have fled the country - approximately 10,000 - we are appalled by the inestimable thousands of missing persons. The Government of Indonesia continues to deny reports of deliberate torture and killing of East Timorese and continues in its attempt to persuade the rest of the world, despite reports to the contrary, that "development and progress" has been brought to a once "backward" people. The East Timorese themselves, however, many of whom have lost family members, are not so easily convinced.

Indigenous World believes in the right of all colonized peoples to self-determination and independence. It believes also that the people of East Timor have not been able to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence, in accordance with the spirit and letter of the Charter, General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) and the Declaration on Principles of International Law and Friendly Relations Among States in accordance with the Charter.

It is to be recalled that following the invasion of East Timor by the armed forces of the Republic of Indonesia, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 384 (1975) of 22 December, which "strongly deplored" the invasion of East Timor and called upon the Government of Indonesia to withdraw "without delay" all its forces from the territory. On 22 April 1976 another Security Council resolution was adopted, again calling upon the government of Indonesia to desist from further aggression and to withdraw all its troops from the territory without "further delay".

The issue of East Timor is again being raised here today in this Commission, as it was discussed in the Special Committee on Decolonization in New York last August, in the Non-Aligned Ministerial Meeting in Luanda a month later, as well as in the general debate of the General Assembly's 40th session. These repeated discussions clearly indicate that the issue of East Timor remains an unresolved problem of decolonization, and as long as the people of that territory are prevented from enjoying their sacred right to self-determination, it is the duty and responsibility of the international community to speak against this injustice.

21 February 1986

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